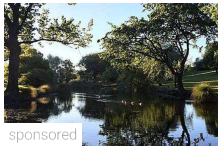


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Serving time: How fine dining in jail is helping prisoners re-enter society

Alison McIntosh, Maria Gebbels and Tracy Harkison · 15:21, Nov 19 2020



FILE

Prison catering and dining programmes aim to tackle re-offending by offering inmates training and practical experience before they finish their jail sentences.

ANALYSIS: Prison food and fine dining aren't usually mentioned together. But various initiatives around the world are changing that, with restaurants located within jails offering both culinary satisfaction and opportunities for positive social change.

Prison catering and dining programmes aim to tackle re-offending and recidivism by offering inmates training and practical experience before they finish their sentences and re-enter society.

The success of various restaurants based in minimum- or medium-security prisons, including [The Clink](#) restaurants in the United Kingdom, the [InColore](#) restaurant in Italy and [INTERNO](#) in Colombia, suggests a definite trend toward this <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/123444355/serving-time-how-fine-dining-in-jail-is-helping-prisoners-reenter-society>

Britain's Clink Charity operates four restaurants in working prisons in [Brixton](#), [Cardiff](#), [High Down](#) and [Styal](#). All are registered catering colleges. Despite the security measures and no alcohol on the menu, we found these restaurants offer a dining experience comparable to any modern, stylish, fine-dining establishment.



FEEL GOOD | WATCH: From jail to java - how coffee is changing inmates' lives

After serving time in jail for violent crimes, baristas at Gangstar Cafe in Cape Town, are now serving up hot cups of java instead. The cafe in Mowbray is training former inmates to become baristas as part of their job readiness program.

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Brixton prison's Clink restaurant [consistently ranks](#) in Tripadvisor's top 10 restaurants in London. The charity itself has received more than 60 awards since its first restaurant opened in 2009.

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A hit with diners

The differences between conventional fine-dining establishments and prison restaurants are obvious. But changing public perceptions of prisoners through prison dining programmes is key to their wider rehabilitation.

The restaurants are usually staffed by prisoners with six to 18 months left on their sentences. They have completed restorative courses and are lower risk or chosen for their good behaviour.

An analysis of 3951 Tripadvisor customer reviews of the four Clink restaurants shows diners reported great meals and professional and memorable experiences. They also appreciated the charity's inspiring ethos.

Comments include: "It is not every day that you get to dine in a category C prison, but I can strongly recommend it. A great concept where training and rehabilitation are the key drivers here – they deliver excellent quality food in a relatively relaxed environment. Well worth supporting."



MEGAN GATTEY/STUFF

Rimutaka Prison inmates have in the past participated in the Wellington On a Plate festival.

Although these restaurants lie within the walls of a prison, customers noted the warm welcome and the relaxed and friendly atmosphere during their visits, despite the initial security checks (including having to leave their phones and laptops outside).

Importantly, the prisoners staffing the restaurants came to be viewed less as inmates and more as trainee hospitality employees capable of delivering outstanding service.

Reducing reoffending

Gaining formal qualifications and training in prison restaurants, as well as having mentoring and support on their release, provides offenders with valuable skills, confidence, dignity and a work ethic that helps them on the outside.

Prison restaurant initiatives also help reduce recidivism. The Clink training programmes – based on five stages from recruitment, training, in-prison support to employment and post-prison mentoring – have reduced the chance of a Clink graduate reoffending by 65.6 per cent.

As Clink chief executive Christopher Moore has explained: "The key to the success of The Clink Charity is that we are one of the only organisations to deliver a five-step integrated model, both sides of the wall."



ROBERT KITCHIN/STUFF

Prison food and fine dining aren't usually mentioned together, but various initiatives around the world are changing that.

A solution for New Zealand

Adopting the successful hospitality training model demonstrated by The Clink Charity should be considered for New Zealand. Our [imprisonment rate is high](#) by developed world standards, with a re-offending rate over 50 per cent.

The low numeracy and literacy skills among New Zealand's prisoner population, as well as general substance abuse and mental health issues, suggest an urgent need for innovative solutions to reoffending and reincarceration rates. It is widely accepted that education reduces recidivism rates.

Adding prison dining programmes would build on existing opportunities for inmates. In 2018, 2017 New Zealand prisoners gained 3003 qualifications. Hospitality qualifications are offered in [13 New Zealand prisons](#), but there are few genuine equivalents to the Clink model beyond [Rimutaka Prison's](#) participation in the Wellington On a Plate festival, and the Auckland Region Women's Correction Facility [cafe](#).

Creating change will be difficult, but prison dining programmes have demonstrated success in increasing prisoners' skills, social support and meaningful employment in the hospitality industry after release.

Furthermore, such programmes provide restaurant-goers with an opportunity to contribute to meaningful change and help break down stereotypes that hold former prisoners back from making a successful transition from cell to society.

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